



# Ford City Restores a Former Industrial Site, and Itself

## Ford City, PA

**L**ocated some 40 miles northeast of Pittsburgh along the Allegheny River, Ford City, Pennsylvania is an example of how a community can rebound from a severe economic blow. Only a few years after the loss of an industrial institution that was the borough's largest employer, Ford City is in the process of creating new commercial, industrial, and recreational space that will be home not only to new industry, but green space and an 8,000 foot walking trail along the river, a public meeting house, and a museum celebrating Ford City's industrial heritage.

The company that left Ford City in 1993 was the same company that helped build the city more than 100 years earlier. Pittsburgh Plate Glass Industries, Inc. (PPG) established itself in Ford City in 1887 and at one time employed 5,000 workers and was the largest plate glass factory in the world. But through a slow decline that started in the mid 1960s—attributed to shrinking markets and labor disagreements—PPG reduced operations and finally, in 1993, shut down entirely. By that time nearly 45 percent of Ford City's population (approximately 6,200 residents during its heyday) had left the area. A statue of the town's founder, PPG's "father of plate glass" John B. Ford, that once surveyed the bustling PPG plant, found itself gazing at 57 acres of idle property representing Ford City's only developable land.

Seven acres of this land came under ownership by Ford City in 1999. This seven-acre parcel had been sold to another company in 1981, who then leased it to a third company, AMCO, for a foundry operation. AMCO filed for bankruptcy in 1995 and abandoned the site, leaving behind three empty buildings and unknown levels of contamination from more than a century of industrial uses. While PPG entered the state's Voluntary Cleanup Program, and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) performed \$225,000 worth of preliminary assessments on the former AMCO property, additional assessments and sampling were required to confirm the Pennsylvania DEP's findings and develop a cleanup plan.

EPA's Brownfields Pilot, awarded to Ford City in 1998, enabled more detailed assessments of the former AMCO property, discovering arsenic and lead in the soil and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the groundwater. In

## JUST THE FACTS:

- In addition to assessments, the Brownfields Pilot assisted Ford City in ongoing negotiations with PPG to turn over the former plant property to the town, following the company's own environmental investigation.
- With more than \$1 million required for cleanup and more than \$4 million estimated to restore existing buildings on just one portion of the site, Ford City enlisted the support of several partners—both federal and state—to move forward in creating the new Heritage and Technology Park (HAT).
- When complete, the HAT will feature more than 90,000 square feet of commercial, office, and light industrial space, and will house a business incubator, a video conference/distance learning center, and a museum paying tribute to Ford City's 105 years of glass making.

**Pittsburgh Plate Glass Industries, Inc. (PPG) established itself in Ford City in 1887 and at one time employed 5,000 workers and was the largest plate glass factory in the world. By the time the company ceased operations in 1993—following a decline that had started in the mid 1960s—nearly 45 percent of Ford City's population had left the area. The 57 acres that were home to the empty glass plant represented Ford City's only developable land.**

addition to assessments, the Pilot assisted Ford City in ongoing negotiations with PPG to turn over the remaining 50 acres to the town, following the company's own environmental investigation. In October 2002, the deed for the remaining 50 acres was transferred to Ford City Borough, providing the town with the entire 57-acre site for cleanup and redevelopment.

Ford City Borough created the Greater Ford City Community Development Corporation (GFCCDC) in 1999 to administer grant funding and develop brownfields. Quarterly public meetings were held to allow community participation in determining the site's reuse. The result was a plan for the new Heritage and Technology Park (HAT), which will feature more than 90,000 square feet of commercial, office, and light industrial space within PPG's former machine shop. The HAT will house a business incubator, a video conference/distance learning center, and a museum paying tribute to Ford City's 105 years of glass making. The 50-acre site has space for 10 to 14 new companies. Redevelopment plans also include a 3,000-square-foot office/public meeting house, installation of 8,000 feet of walking trails along the river, a new parking area, and a wall to protect against river flooding. As a result of site restoration efforts, the Borough now has its first ever green space along the river.

With more than \$1 million required for cleanup and more than \$4 million estimated to restore existing buildings on the seven-acre, former AMCO site alone, Ford City needed the support of several partners—both federal and state—to move forward in creating the HAT. A grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Economic Development Initiative provided \$1.5 million for redevelopment of the three former AMCO buildings. The Economic Development Administration contributed \$581,000 to rebuild the former foundry building. The state contributed \$3 million in the form of a capital budget award. The Steel Industry Heritage Corporation put in \$75,000 toward creation of the industrial heritage museum. And the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers donated approximately \$1 million in services to restore the flood prevention wall, install a new parking area, and create a 500-foot walking trail. A match of \$265,000 was contributed from the PA DEP for the river wall project.

Cleanup and restoration has been finished on the 30,000-square-foot, former ARCO Foundry building. The building is now home to OEM Shades, a window blind manufacturer with the potential to create as many as 125 jobs by the end of its 5-year lease period. Cleanup is also complete at the HAT's second building, a 60,000 square-foot structure that is now in the design stages for reuse. Startup of the HAT is the first step in a major restoration for a town that less than a decade ago watched its hopes for prosperity vanish.

Because of these efforts, Ford City was adopted by the Pittsburgh Federal Executive Board to demonstrate successful partnerships between the federal government and grass roots revitalization efforts. The city was also nominated as a "Rebuild America" community model by the Department of Energy, which provided technical expertise to ensure that the HAT's buildings would be energy efficient.

## CONTACTS:

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Or visit EPA's Brownfields Web site at:  
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>